

## Reciprocity by jackwabbit

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Family

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2017-11-07 22:16:13

**Updated:** 2017-11-07 22:16:13

**Packaged:** 2019-12-17 04:46:49

**Rating:** K+

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 1,449

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** Vignette. Found Family. Dad Hopper. Mild Jopper if you're so inclined. Spoilers: Stranger Things, Season Two. Summary: Hopper has a gift for Eleven. What she gives him back is as perfect as it is unexpected.

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## Reciprocity

Rated: PG

Category: Vignette. Found Family. Dad Hopper. Mild Jopper if you're so inclined.

Time Frame: Season Two. After the gate, before the dance.

Spoilers: Stranger Things, Season Two.

Summary: Hopper has a gift for Eleven. What she gives him back is as perfect as it is unexpected.

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Jim Hopper was watching TV when he heard the door behind him creak open, then closed.

He took a deep breath, in and out, then slowly turned around.

The sight that met him took his breath away.

Eleven stood there, looking hesitant and nervous, in the dress Max (of all people) had gotten for her.

It looked good. It fit pretty well, but it had just the right amount of bagginess up top make him feel better and to push the neckline just a bit askew.

Which, really, at the end of the day, was perfect. Because nothing in their lives could ever line up just right. Jim wouldn't have known what to do with just right.

But he knew what to do with this.

He smiled as El fidgeted and frowned. She looked worried.

"You look great, kid," he said.

Eleven brightened.

"OK?" she asked.

"More than OK," said Hopper. "Now come here. I've got something for you."

Eleven's brow furrowed and her head canted to one side as she stepped around the couch and sat down next to Hopper. She looked puzzled.

"Remember how we talked about how this is a special occasion?"

El nodded and beamed at Hopper, no longer puzzled but just excited.

"About how this isn't going to happen often and how we have to make it short?"

Eleven deflated somewhat and nodded again, more glumly this time.

"One hour, kiddo," said Hopper, giving her a serious look. "One."

Another nod, this one even more gloomy, answered him.

Hopper sighed. "I know. But it's the best compromise I can give you for now. OK?"

"Half happy," muttered Eleven.

"Exactly," answered Hopper. "Now, about that hour. I figure," he said, leaning over and stretching an arm under the couch, "you can't be on time if you don't know what time it is. So I got you this."

He set a small, brightly wrapped package on the couch between them and Eleven looked up at him with wide eyes.

"It's for you," explained Hopper.

"A present?"

Hopper chuckled. "Yeah, kid. A present. Open it."

Eleven beamed again and Hopper snorted a laugh as she tore into the paper. In seconds, she had the box open and was holding his gift to her. Hopper bit his lower lip a little, more nervous than he thought he'd be, as she held it.

When she didn't say anything for a long moment, Hopper filled the void.

"It's a watch," he said.

Eleven rolled her eyes at him. "No shit, Sherlock."

Hopper stared back at El like she'd grown a second head. Sarcasm, cursing, and eye rolling? Maybe he should rethink his decision to let her see those other kids after all. Because he wasn't ready for this. Not yet. He opened his mouth to rebuke her language, if nothing else, but before he could get his words out, Eleven stopped him cold.

"It's pretty. It's really for me?"

She looked at him with such honest amazement that he forgot about correcting much of anything.

He smiled slowly, suddenly realizing that El had likely never received a present before, and loving the moment too much to care about a stupid phrase she'd probably picked up from him anyway.

"Yeah. It's for you," he said. "You want me to put it on?"

Eleven nodded so many times Hopper laughed as he took the watch from her hands.

"Alright, settle down. Let me see your hand."

El obliged by holding out her left wrist, and Hopper fastened the watch securely around it. It was a little big, but it did the job just fine. Eleven held up her hand and then looked at Hopper with a goofy grin. Her eyes were bright and shiny.

"Like you," she said.

Hopper gave her a confused look. "What?"

"Like you," El repeated, reaching out and taking hold of Hopper's right hand with her left. Her right hand then fiddled with the blue band on his wrist.

Hopper swallowed thickly and blinked a few times.

"Yeah," he said, "like me."

"But yours doesn't tell time," said Eleven, so serious that Hopper couldn't help but chuckle.

"No, it doesn't tell time."

"Still pretty, though," she said. "Just different."

Eleven continued to mess with the bracelet as she spoke. Her focus was entirely drawn to it. So she didn't notice the effect her words had on the man wearing it.

Hopper wasn't looking at the bracelet. Or the watch. Or anything other than the girl in front of him. As El spun first her watch and then his bracelet around on their wrists, Hopper took a few shaky breaths, then whispered two words so quietly Eleven didn't even react.

*Just different.*

After another moment, he slowly put his free hand on El's, stilling her movements. She looked up at him then, and without knowing exactly why, she just waited. Maybe it was the slight sheen of tears in his eyes that she didn't understand. Maybe it was the conflicted look on his face. Maybe it was the fact that now it was his turn to fiddle with the blue band on his wrist. But whatever it was, she stayed quiet.

And for a long moment, so did he. Then he slowly slid one finger under his bracelet and slipped it off his wrist. He held it out tentatively to her and his eyes took on a pleading look.

"You want to wear it? Just for tonight?"

Eleven's eyes grew wide.

"I can wear two?"

Hopper sniffled a little. "Yeah, kid. You can wear two."

El slowly took the bracelet and slid it onto her wrist. It settled just below her watch like it was meant to be there, and she grinned up at Hopper, who was still for another minute, then slapped his hands on his knees and stood up without another word. He grabbed his coat and headed for the door.

Eleven sat on the couch for a bit longer, not sure what was happening, until Hopper called out to her.

"You going to sit there all night? Thought you wanted to go to the dance?"

At that, El jumped up and grabbed her own jacket and pushed past Hopper and through the door of the cabin. She beat him to the truck, but he wasn't far behind.

The drive to town was a quiet one, filled with only the radio.

Eleven was too nervous and excited to even ask questions, and Hopper didn't speak again until they pulled up outside the school.

"Remember what we talked about."

"I will," answered Eleven.

Hopper raised an eyebrow at her. "Say it."

"Don't leave the school. If I don't know a word, just nod and smile like I do. Stay close to Mike, Will, Dustin, Lucas, and Max. Remember Nancy and Jonathan are there if I need them."

She trailed off, and Hopper raised his brows further until Eleven sighed.

"And only for an hour."

Hopper continued to look at El plainly, but she didn't offer any more, so he prompted her.

"And?"

Eleven sighed again and there was that eye roll Hopper was already

sure he was tired of.

"And no using powers."

"And no using powers," echoed Hopper. "I mean it, El."

"I know. I can't. I understand."

Hopper nodded, sincerely hoping she truly did.

"OK, then," he said, slapping Eleven gently on the leg. "Get on in there and have fun. I'll be right outside if you need me."

Eleven didn't need to be told twice. She was out the door and into the school before Hopper could say another word.

He watched her go, then parked his truck. He sat there long enough to smoke one cigarette, then climbed out. The nicotine had settled the shaking. Time had regulated his breathing. But he couldn't quite shake the nausea. He was worried sick. Literally.

He decided to go for a walk. Maybe it would help. He didn't have a destination in mind, but he wasn't surprised when he wandered up the drive after two laps of the football field and found Joyce Byers there.

Nor was he surprised when Eleven was late, but neither one of them noticed.